

AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

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BASTAR STATE—NATURAL DIVISIONS
Scale (approx.) : 1 inch = 32 miles

CHAPTER II

THE SETTING IN SPACE; THE PHYSICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE
GEOGRAPHY OF BASTAR

BEFORE dealing with the Maria Gonds, I propose to describe in this and the following chapter the main features of the physical and administrative geography and the ethnography of Bastar. The political divisions frequently are founded on the old tribal organization of the country, to which I have alluded in the first chapter; and in discussing the distribution of the tribes it is impossible to avoid constantly referring to them. 000

The great river Indrawati, which flows across the centre of the State from east to west with a winding course within the State of about 240 miles, almost bisects the State, and is its main geographical feature. It rises near Rampur Thuamul in Kalahandi, one of the former Orissa States, whence it flows south-west some thirty miles till, after forming the boundary between Kalahandi and the Orissa Province for eight or nine miles, it crosses the south-east corner of the Naurangpur taluq of the latter, and then for a winding course of some sixty miles divides the Naurangpur from the Jeypore taluq of Jeypore zamindari, till it enters the Jagdalpur tahsil of Bastar near the confluence of the Bhaskel tributary, thirteen miles above Jagdalpur. At Chitrakot, twenty-four miles by road and thirty-five by river below Jagdalpur, the Indrawati plunges off the edge of the great 2,000 feet plateau of north-east Bastar and northern Jeypore in a beautiful horseshoe fall ninety-four feet high, followed by a series of wild rapids down a valley rapidly descending between high cliff ramparts. In its course across Jeypore zamindari and Jagdalpur tahsil it is a deep sluggish river, winding along in great S-bends through field and evergreen sal forest, and always more or less rusty in colour from flowing over deep beds of red laterite or *murrem*. It receives no large tributaries from the south above Chitrakot, as here it flows close to the watershed dividing it from the Kolab-Sabari, the great tributary of the Godavari that rises in the Eastern Ghats above Jeypore and for many miles forms the eastern boundary of Bastar; at one point a tributary of the Kolab is less than a mile from the main current of the Indrawati. But just above Chitrakot falls it is joined by the Narangi, and about ten miles below the falls by the Baordig, which drain most of north-east Bastar (the Kondagaon tahsil). 133 ● [134]

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For the rest of its course from Chitrakot to its junction with the Godavari near Bhadrakali in Bhopalpatnam zamindari on the western border it is typical of any great river draining mountainous country. It loses its rusty colour at Chitrakot, and becomes a series of rapids and deep pools, giving way to fresh rapids wherever it passes over sheets of rock or pierces through successive mountain barriers in wild gorges. The pools are often great land-locked lakes, with deeply wooded islands, the haunts of tiger, sambar and wild buffalo. It receives various tributaries, of which the chief Bastar rivers are the Gudra, the Nei Bherat¹ and the Kotri on the north bank, and on the south bank the Dantewara, the Berudi and the Bhopalpatnam Chintawag. The Gudra and the Nei Bherat take most of the drainage of the wild tangle of the Abujhmar hills, save for smaller mountain torrents, such as the Goinder that descends from Hikul over the magnificent Handawada falls (not marked on the maps), and the Komra that for much of its length forms the Bastar-Central Provinces (Chanda) boundary. The Gudra drains the Tulagotal, Farsigotal, Farsal, Bardal and Chudala (Chhota) Dongar *parganas* of the Abujhmar mountains and other adjacent *parganas* of the Antagarh tahsil; the gorge near Chhota Dongar where it leaves the Abujhmar mountains in a narrow loch between forested peaks, its banks deep in bamboo, *Osmunda regalis* and other ferns, is beautiful. The Nei Bherat rises near Narainpur in the Kurangel *pargana* of Antagarh, the north-western tahsil, and flows due west past Sonpur and through the Nurbhum Maria *pargana*; then turning south-west through the Tapalibhum (Chhotemar) and Behramar (Baremar) Maria *parganas* of Antagarh, it crosses the south-east corner of the Ahiri zamindari in Chanda district to join the Indrawati and the Kotri or Paralkot river in a trijunction of unforgettable beauty 'beneath the fortified rock of Bhamragarh, in a wild expanse of hill and forest unbroken by a single clearing'.² Besides the Maria *parganas* of Antagarh already mentioned, it drains the Hukkagotal and Jatawada and parts of the Bardal and Farsal Maria *parganas* of Antagarh, and the portion of the Abujhmar mountains that extends beyond Bastar

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¹ Wrongly marked 'Nihra' on the old Topographical Survey maps of the sixties, slightly revised modern editions of which are still the only maps available of most of Bastar. 'Nei Bherat' means in the Maria dialect 'Dog River', so called after the numbers of otters in the river.

The names on these old maps are often wrong, and represent the efforts of Telugu or Bengali surveyors to reproduce the difficult guttural and other sounds of Maria. The maps are full of other inaccuracies, and seem often to have been drawn from the imagination of surveyors afraid of fever, tigers and aboriginal magic.

² Lucie-Smith's 1869 Chanda Settlement Report, para. 36. He calls the Nihra River by the name 'Pamia Ghootum'.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949

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PLATE II

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THE CHITRAKOT FALLS OF THE RIVER INDRAWATI



CONFLUENCE OF RIVERS INDRAWATI AND KOMRA.
BORDER OF BASTAR AND CHANDA



THE ARANPUR PASS

[facing p. 22]

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into the south-east corner of Chanda district and is inhabited by the same hill Marias as the Bastar *parganas* in these mountains. The Kotri is far the largest of the tributaries of the Indrawati. Its main stream rises far north, in the Pannabaras zamindari of Drug district; it is joined at Gudumpara in Kanker State by the Kandra which drains the Sambalpur tahsil of Kanker; below Partabpur in the north-west corner of Bastar by a large branch also called the Kotri which rises from two main sources in the Matlaghat and Raoghat mountains and drains all the north of Antagarh tahsil, including the Maria *parganas* of Padalbhumi (Pataladesh), Tapalibhumi and Behramar; and by another large stream a little west of Paralkot. It then crosses south-east Chanda to the west of the Nei Bherat, to meet the latter and the Indrawati at Bhamragarh.

As these northern tributaries between them drain the country of the Abujhmar Maria, so the southern tributaries drain the northern lands of the Bison-horn or Dandami Maria, the Indrawati and its small tributary near Barsur, the Mander, being roughly the boundary between them. The chief southern tributary is the Dantewara, made up of the Sankani and the Dankani, which unite just by the famous Dantewara temple. The Sankani rises near the lofty (4,067 feet) Nandiraj peak of the Bailadila mountains, and drains the Arampur, Bachel and Dugeli *parganas* of Dantewara tahsil, while the Dankani rises from the Tangri Dongri ghats on the south edge of the great north-eastern plateau, from sources near Killepal and Paknar, and drains the Katakalian and Kuakonda tracts of Dantewara tahsil. The other southern tributaries of the Indrawati do not call for remark here; except the Dantewara, the Berudi and the Bhopalpatnam Chintawag, they are as small as the southern tributaries above the Chitrakot falls, the Indrawati being close to the watersheds that separate it from the Kolab-Sabari and the main Godavari except in the areas drained by the three tributaries named above.

Apart from a few streams in the north-east of Bastar which flow off the northern slopes of the Telinghat hills near Keskul into the Mahanadi system, and in the south-west the Talper-Chintawag system draining the western slopes of the Bailadila mountains and the Bijapur tahsil directly into the Godavari, the only other important river-system is that of the Kolab-Sabari (the river is known in Jeypore and in most of Bastar as the Kolab, and as the Sabari or Savari in the Konta tahsil of Bastar and the adjacent taluqs of the Jeypore and East Godavari Agencies). Rising on the 3,000 feet Korapat plateau of the Eastern Ghats between Jeypore and Korapat, it cascades down on to the Jeypore-Bastar plateau, flows north a few miles to its junction with the Jaura near the Bastar

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Irredenta town of Kotapad, and then south to Korokpur. Thence for eighteen miles it divides the Kanker State Forest of Bastar from the Jeypore taluq, but from the confluence of the Kanker river it turns south away from the Bastar border into the Malkangiri taluq of Jeypore and then west past the Bastar Irredenta *pargana* of Salmigarh for about twenty-six miles; it flows west then for another five miles, as the Bastar border, as far as the confluence of the Kumakoleng and Thakawada rivers. For the next thirty-five miles, as far as Sukma, it enters the Sukma zamindari of Bastar, and from Sukma southwards for ten miles it is the Sukma-Malkangiri boundary, and thence still on the whole southwards for forty-four miles as far as Konta it divides the Konta tahsil of Bastar from Malkangiri. Just below Konta, after its junction with the Sileru, it enters the Bhadrachalam taluq of the East Godavari Agency of Madras, and after another twenty miles of southward course flows into the Godavari at Kunavaram. Konta is a river port accessible to small steamers from the rainy season till January. The trade of south-east Bastar therefore passes through it, and it is a focus of Telugu influence. The Kolab-Sabari is altogether about 202 miles in length, for seventy-seven of which it forms the Bastar boundary, and for thirty-five of which it flows inside the State, while in another thirty or thirty-five miles of its course it receives the drainage of parts of Bastar. Where it falls from the 2,000 foot plateau to Salmigarh beneath the heights of Tulsidongri (3,925 feet) it resembles the Indrawati in its wild beauty; the two rivers, indeed, are much alike in their scenery and the levels through which they pass. On its right bank it receives all the drainage of the Parja country in the south-east of Jagdalpur tahsil and the north of Sukma zamindari; that of the Bison-horn Maria country of the adjacent parts of Jagdalpur, a small portion of Dantewara, and western Sukma; and all that of the 'Koya' and Bison-horn Maria country in Konta tahsil east of the Gogonda-Tikanpalli hills (2,000 to 2,600 feet) and the Golapalli hills (1,200 to 2,800 feet).

With the river-systems thus outlined, it is easy to demonstrate the main physical and administrative divisions of the country. First there is the great north-eastern plateau, stretching from the Telinghat hills about 2,500 feet high and a few miles south of the northern border to the Tangri Dongri and Tulsidongri ranges that divide Jagdalpur tahsil from Sukma zamindari and Dantewara tahsil. The plateau extends eastward into Jeypore and Kalahandi, while on the west the Matlaghat hills and the hills that run roughly south from Benur on the Kondagaon-Antagarh-Rajnandgaon road to Karikot on the Indrawati below the Chitrakot Falls divide the

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plateau from Antagarh tahsil. The northern half of this north-eastern plateau is Kondagaon tahsil, and the southern Jagdalpur. The height of the plateau varies from 2,500 or 2,400 feet at its northern and southern edges to about 1,800 feet near Jagdalpur. It is a region of evergreen forests, with the beautiful sal (*Shorea robusta*) as its characteristic tree. The temperature seldom exceeds 104° in the summer, and at Jagdalpur descends to 40° in the winter, while hoar frosts are not uncommon in the forests. Kondagaon tahsil is under-developed and jungly, much of it and Antagarh having been comparatively recently settled by Gond immigrants from Chhattisgarh. Jagdalpur, on the other hand, has miles of excellent rice cultivation in its extensive open plains, and is the only heavily populated part of the State, except adjacent parts of Dantewara. On its south-eastern and southern edges, however, it has hilly country heavily forested or inhabited by primitive Parjas and Bison-horn Marias.

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The north-west corner of the State is the Antagarh tahsil. The north of this is a continuation of the Chhattisgarh-Kanker plain 800 or 900 feet above sea-level, bounded on the west and north by the Chanda and Drug districts of the Central Provinces and by Kanker State. This plain, the second main natural division of Bastar, is reached from Keshal and north Kondagaon through the Amabera *pargana*, which, though on the 2,000 feet plateau, is in Antagarh, by a forest road descending the steep Matlaghat by a recently re-aligned and easily-graded descent. The main road from Jagdalpur and Kondagaon through Antagarh to Rajnandgaon rail-head enters the tahsil in the Benur *pargana* on the 2,000 feet plateau and descends 200 or 300 feet to Narainpur which, with the adjacent *parganas* of Kurangal, Dugal, Baragaon, Ghat Jhorian and Bare Jhorian, as well as Benur and the lowland or 'Kalpatti' villages of Chhote Dongar *pargana*, are an intermediate stage between the true 2,000 feet plateau and the plain of north Antagarh. The inhabitants are mostly what were called by Glasford and other early writers Jhorias, in appearance scarcely distinguishable from the Marias of the Abujhmar hills, with similar dancing dress, and customs similar, but considerably modified by sojourn in the lowlands and contact with other tribes. From Narainpur a forest road runs westward along the Nei Bherat valley to Sonpur, with an extension thence to Paralkot and Maroda, where it meets another forest road that comes westward from Taroki on the Narainpur-Antagarh road across the north Antagarh plain. The Sonpur, Paralkot and Paralkot-Kalpatti *parganas* are really lowland *parganas* in the middle of highland Maria *parganas*, and the two latter belong properly speaking to the north Antagarh plain. The

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- 133 Sonpur *pargana*, however, has many Hill Maria villages, and a sprinkling of Halbas and 'Jhorias'.

[441] The road from Narainpur to Antagarh descends the Raoghat near Aturbera village between a spur of the Abujhmar mass of hills 2,938 feet in height and the Matlaghat hills, down the sal-clad valley of a stream that drains into the Kotri river. The Antagarh plain has the 'Muria' *parganas* of Antagarh, Kolar, Surebahi, Bomra, Kirangal, Kalpatti, and Bandadesh, besides Paralkot and Paralkot-Kalpatti already mentioned.

The third great natural division of the State is the Abujhmar mountain mass. Roughly speaking, this is composed of all the wild hill country bounded on the south by the Indrawati, on the north by the Antagarh plain, on the east by the Jhoria country described above and the Gudra valley from Chhota Dongar to Mangnar near the Indrawati and Barsur, and on the west by the Kotri river from Partabpur to its junction with the Indrawati at Bhamragarh in the Ahiri zamindari of the Chanda district. This tangle of hills is roughly rectangular, but at its north-eastern corner throws two great spurs into the Antagarh plain by Raoghat (already mentioned) and Kolar, and at its north-western corner projects a bastion of hill almost to the Kotri valley between Partabpur and Koilibera. The north-eastern spurs are now in the Matla State Forest, but the north-western bastion has as its northern face the Padalibhum *pargana*, with the Tapalibhum and Nurbhum *parganas* to the side and south of this, all three occupied by Hill Marias. The hill mass is so cracked and seamed with valleys running in all directions, that it is not possible to point out any main hill systems; the only clues that help to a conception of its features are the watersheds. The northern slopes drain into the Bastar branch of the Kotri, and the north-western into the main Kotri after the junction of the Drug-Kanker and Bastar branches. Below this, the great trough of the Nei Bherat valley cleaves the mountains from Narainpur on the north-eastern edge westward for thirty-five miles through Sonpur into the Nurbhum *pargana*, where it turns south-west through the Behramar *pargana* and the Chanda Hill Maria country to Bhamragarh. The watershed dividing this from the streams that flow into the Gudra runs roughly south-west from the north-western corner of the Hukkagotal *pargana* just south of the Nei Bherat valley along a line of crests to Kutul village in Bardal *pargana*, thence south to Dhurbera, the village of the headman of the Farsal *pargana*, and slightly east of south from there to Adeq in Chhota Dongar Mar *pargana*. From the hills between Dhurbera and Adeq some smaller streams flow south-west direct into the Indrawati. From the crests running first eastwards

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from Adeq and then south-eastwards towards the Maria villages of Mangnar *pargana*, streams flow southwards or south-westwards into the Indrawati. 133 ●

Though this block of hills is a homogeneous tract, peopled entirely by Hill Marias, it unfortunately is split up administratively. The south-western corner above Bhamragarh and Lahir is British territory, part of the Ahiri zamindari of Chanda district. All the *parganas* north of the watershed between the Nei Bherat and Indrawati on the one hand and the Gudra on the other are in Antagarh tahsil. The slopes draining into the Indrawati from the Chanda border eastwards to a line running north from the confluence of the Indrawati and the Dantewara form the Kutru Mar and the Bhairamgarh Mar *parganas* of Kutru zamindari; the Hikul-Toinar-Hendawada group of eight hill villages east of this is part of Dantewara tahsil, and the few hill villages at the south-east corner are part of the outlying Mangnar *pargana* of the Bhopal-patnam zamindari.

The peaks of the Abujhmar vary in height from 2,050 feet on the northern fringes to 3,322, the highest point near Tadanar in Mangnar *pargana*. Fourteen peaks exceed 3,000 feet in height. Except the Marias themselves, few persons in Bastar know the tract at all; and before I visited it, all the old tales served up to Glasford in the sixties were again cooked up for my benefit; the country was so rugged that I should have to climb on my hands and knees; it was impossible for elephants and quite out of the question for horses; I should be unable to get bearers for my camp kit; fever was rampant; distances were enormous; and so on. Some of the marches are difficult; but then a car can be taken now up to Orcha, the chief village of Chhota Dongar Mar; the people are friendly in the extreme, and if properly treated and reimbursed in salt, beads, mirrors, cloth and pork, and allowed to dance at every camp, they will turn out in numbers to carry all necessary equipment. It is not difficult to arrange camps at distances at once reasonable for the walker and far enough apart to make it unnecessary to detain bearers from the previous camp to carry luggage on to the next camp. There are no cart tracks and no carts; and there are many steep ascents and descents on the hill tracks. Good water is everywhere available from clear perennial springs. The hills are far freer from mosquitoes and fever than the plains below; but the traveller who brings a medical assistant and simple medicines with him will find the Marias in great need of elementary medical relief and very grateful for it. [489]

The scenery varies. On the edges of the hills there are often fine views of the plains below, while on the northern and eastern

● 133 slopes and in the Mangnar and Dantewara Mar villages there are often fine patches of sal and other evergreen trees. On the hill-tops and on slopes exhausted by shifting cultivation, high grass and stunted trees make the country monotonous to the eye and tiring through lack of shade. Where the slopes are newly cleared and have once been burnt for shifting *penda* cultivation, often a small grove of trees is left on the summit, like nothing so much as the top-knot of hair on the crown of a Maria's otherwise roughly-shaved head. But the moment you descend off the rocky plateaux you meet green glades and hurrying streams, or may feel the sudden amaze of a prospect such as that of the blue apex of the lofty Bailadila ridge seen beyond the haze of the Indrawati valley down the valley of a stream that far below the ridge between Itulnar and Hikul races due south to the Indrawati.

161 There are only between 150 and 160 villages inhabited in all
361 this area of about 1,500 square miles, and there are only 11,500 Hill Marias. This means one village in every ten square miles, and less than eight persons to the square mile. In few places can you lose yourself in such solitudes.

635 North Bastar thus consists administratively of the Antagarh, Kondagaon and Jagdalpur tahsils, half of the Jagdalpur tahsil being south of the Indrawati, and of the portions of the Kutru and Bhopalpatnam zamindaris and the Dantewara tahsil north of the Indrawati.

635 In South-Bastar there are the Dantewara, Bijapur and Konta
491 tahsils, and the Sukma, Kutru, Bhopalpatnam and Kotapalli-Pamer zamindaris; these four zamindaris alone survive out of the seventeen or eighteen of old times. A great western road runs 134 miles from Jagdalpur through Gidam, Karli, Matawara, Bijapur and Bhopalpatnam to Timer on the Indrawati, opposite Patagudam in Chanda district, whence there is a forest road to Sironcha; branches south from Gidam and Karli run to Dantewara, with a further extension to Kameli at the foot of the Bailadila hills; north from Gidam to Barsur, and from Matawara to Kutru; and south from Bhopalpatnam to Tarlagudam on the Godavari and thence over the Latpatkandi pass into the Nugur and Albaka taluqs of Madras. A great southern road runs 114 miles from Jagdalpur to Sukma and Konta. A network of forest roads of recent construction links these roads together between Tirathgarh in Jagdalpur tahsil, Katakalian, Kuakonda and Dantewara, or southward from Kuakonda to the Kolab-Sabari at Misma on the Konta road, and to Konta via the Arampur pass, Jaggergonda and Golapalli; while Bijapur is linked to Cherla and Jaggergonda to Dummagudam, both on the Godavari. With these and other

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forest roads there are now few places in south Bastar out of reach of a motor-car, in the fair weather.

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Dantewara tahsil is a horseshoe plain between the Tangri Dongri ghats at the edge of Jagdalpur tahsil on the east, the Abujhmar mountains on the north, and the great sword-blade north and south ridge of Bailadila on the west. Its general level is about 400 feet below that of the Jagdalpur tahsil, and it is an intermediate step between the north-eastern plateau and the great plains of South Bastar. The main road descends steeply to it from Killepal and Bastanar. This Dantewara valley may almost be regarded as the fourth natural division of Bastar; though small portions of the east of Kutru zamindari and the north of Bijapur tahsil are on the same level, there is between them and Dantewara tahsil the great barrier of the Bailadila ridge, except where the narrow Indrawati valley separates the northern end of the ridge from the Abujhmar mountains.

The rest of Bastar is sometimes described as one great southern plain varying in level from 600 to 300 feet according to the proximity of the Godavari. Actually, however, there is yet another plateau to be crossed on the western road (and on its forest branches that strike off towards the Godavari) before the traveller descends on to the real Godavari plain. Its level varies from 1,100 to 900 feet (leaving out of account, in this as in all the plateaux and plains of Bastar, the frequent spurs and isolated hills). On the southern road to Konta, and on the forest roads descending from Dantewara to Konta tahsil and Sukma zamindari by the Arampur, Koriras and Mokpal passes, on the other hand, the traveller gets at once off the northern 2,000 feet plateau, in the case of the southern road, and off the Dantewara valley level in those of the forest roads, to the Godavari or southern plain. This intermediate western plateau may be regarded as the fifth natural division, and called the Kutru-Bijapur plateau. On the north and north-west the Indrawati is its boundary, so far as Bastar is concerned, as far as the hills which begin north of Desli in Sironcha tahsil and cross the Indrawati into Bastar to form the boundary of the Kutru and Bhopalpatnam zamindaris; the gorge in which the Indrawati boils through these hills, the last barrier to its union with the Godavari, is sinister in its magnificence. The hills run thence south-west along the border of the two zamindaris, cross the western road a little west of Bijapur village and continue south-west to the Isalnar pass on the Nelasnar-Cherla forest road, and thence westward till they merge with the foot-hills at the southern end of the Bailadila ridge, a little north of the Arampur pass.

This Kutru-Bijapur plateau comprises all Kutru zamindari

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except the two Hill Maria *parganas* north of the Indrawati already mentioned; the isolated Mirthul *pargana* of Bhopalpatnam zamindari sandwiched between the Dantewara tahsil and the south-eastern corner of Kutru zamindari along the western slopes of the Bailadila ridge; and the northern and greater portion of Bijapur tahsil.

The riverain tract spoken of above as the Godavari plain may be treated as the sixth and last natural division. 'Riverain region' would be a better name, as it is not all plain or Godavari valley; there are high hill ranges and other important river valleys. It falls into three sub-divisions. The first and northern is the area drained by the Bhopalpatnam Chintawag, which joins the Indrawati a little south of Bhopalpatnam, and the Indrawati and Godavari valleys from the Kutru-Bhopalpatnam boundary on the north to the tri-junction of Bastar, Hyderabad and Madras near Kothagudam on the Godavari in the south. All of this area except the upper valleys of the Chintawag is in the main territory of the Bhopalpatnam zamindari; the upper valleys are part of Bijapur tahsil. A lofty range of hills begins from the confluence of the Indrawati and Chintawag and runs south-east thence parallel to and at a distance of a few miles from the Godavari as far as the Talper valley; the Bastar-Madras boundary runs along the crests of this range. Its highest peaks are more than 3,000 feet above sea-level. This barrier effectively shuts southern Bijapur off from the Godavari.

The second sub-division is the area drained by the Talper and its tributary the Chintalnar Chintawag. The Talper rises in the highest valley of the Bailadila ridge, almost from the 4,000 feet level, and within a few hundred yards of the source of the Sankani. Thence it flows slightly west of south to join the Godavari a few miles below Cherla. It drains the south of the Bailadila hills and of the hills at the southern edge of the Kutru-Bijapur plateau; the Chintawag takes the drainage of the Aranpur pass and the eastern slopes of the Gogonda-Tikanpalli hills (p. 24 *supra*) and of the Golapalli hills. This sub-division comprises the remainder of southern Bijapur, the outlying Lingagiri block of Bhopalpatnam, the whole of the Kotapalli-Pamer zamindari, and, of the Konta tahsil, that western portion which was once the Chintalnar zamindari. Much of this region is extremely sparsely populated, and wide areas are marked in the new maps as 'dense forest and bamboos' or 'high grass'. The Kotapalli-Pamer zamindari has been almost depopulated by the maladministration of its zamindar, and is therefore now under management by the State; as at one point it is barely three miles from the Godavari at Sirur it has natural advantages which would have attracted settlers from

- 133 Madras if it had been reasonably managed. The few 'Dorla' villages are the most miserable in Bastar.

The third sub-division is the Kolab-Sabari valley from the southern slopes of the hills at the edge of the 2,000 feet plateau and the Dantewara valley plateau to the border of the Bhadrachalam taluq of Madras on the south. The northern portion of this, the Sukma zamindari, is a punchbowl ringed by the high edges of the Jagdalpur and Dantewara plateaux from Tulsidongri in the north-east counter-clockwise to a point in the south-west of the zamindari, where the foot-hills of the Gogonda-Tikanpalli hills approach the Kolab-Sabari near Chikpalli; the hills are continued across the river and the Bastar border still counter-clockwise towards Malkangiri, and thence back to Tulsidongri. There are two small detached portions of Jagdalpur tahsil in the north of the zamindari, around Kukanar and the lower waters of the Thakawara and Kumakoleng rivers respectively. South of Sukma zamindari the valley opens out again to form the main block of Konta tahsil, including the former Bhiji zamindari, the level of which falls nearly to 250 feet above the sea by Konta at its south-east corner; here the Bastar portion of the valley is very narrow, as nearly all the south of Konta tahsil is occupied by the ranges of the Golapalli mountains which at one point reach a height of more than 2,800 feet.

- 132 In contrast with north Bastar, with its evergreen moist forests, cool climate, abundant water-supply and often thick population,
133 south Sukma, almost all Konta, the Pamer-Kotapalli zamindari
137 and much of south Bijapur are hot dry regions of deciduous forests, deficient water and sparse population. The rivers are short stony torrents rushing down in the monsoon to the adjacent Godavari, Talper or Kolab-Sabari, and drying up often before January. Teak is the characteristic timber tree.

- 635 There will be found in Appendix I a statement of the areas and populations of the six tahsils and four zamindaris into which modern Bastar is divided. Each of these administrative units is called
162 after the name of its headquarters; except Jagdalpur with a (1931) population of 10,128, the other headquarters are only villages, and not always large villages; in 1931, of the 2,442 villages in Bastar only five had populations between 2,000 and 2,500, and forty-two populations between 1,000 and 2,000.

- 634 Frequent mention was made in this chapter of the smaller 'pargana' unit. The first use that I can find of this word is in Appendix IX of Glasford's 1862 report, in which, of the forty-three non-zamindari sub-divisions of Bastar, seventeen are called *parganas* and twenty-six *garhs*. In Elliot's 1855 report the names are given of forty-eight *garhs* and nine taluqs into which the non-zamindari

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949

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[Faded text]

Scenery on the Salari River near Kunta

Typical scenery of the Abujmahar Mountains

[Faded text]



[End Plate A]

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Scene on the Indrawati River

The Chitrakot Falls in Flood



Plate I

[p. 4 (A)]

Plate 11

●/33



The Kotri River

[346]



Lingo's shrine at
Semurgaon



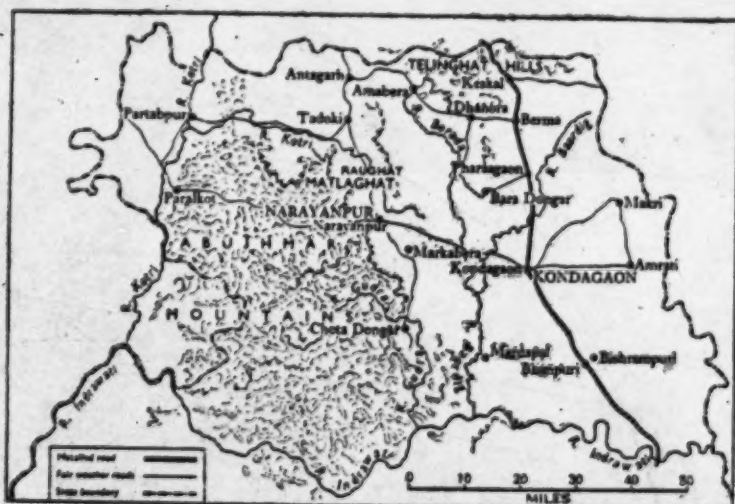
View from the Keskal Ghat

[p. 4 (B)]

INTRODUCTION

131 The territory north of the Indrawati is divided into three administrative divisions. The first, in the north-east, is the Kondagaon Tahsil; the second, in the north-west, is the Narayanpur, formerly the Antagarh, Tahsil, and the third, to the south, is the Jagdalpur Tahsil. Of these only the first two are inhabited by the type of Muria whose institutions and life are the subject of this book; in the heavily populated and fertile lowlands of the Jagdalpur Tahsil the Muria have no ghotul and, under Palace and other influences, have largely abandoned their characteristic beliefs and practices.

133 The Kondagaon Tahsil occupies the great north-eastern plateau of Bastar. This plateau, which is some 2400 feet above sea-level, runs south from the Telinghat Hills as far as Tulsidongri below Jagdalpur. To the east it extends



PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE NARAYANPUR AND KONDAGAON TAHSILS

into Jeypore and Kalahandi, and on the west is bordered by the Matlaghat and a range of hills extending south from Benur to Karikot. The scenery is green and pleasant, but rather monotonous except round Bara Dongar—where there are picturesque hills—and in the Chalka Pargana in the neighbourhood of the Boroda and Baordig rivers, where great rocks rising above the fields and forest combine with the quiet river views to make many pictures of serene beauty.

There are two main rivers in the tahsil. The Baordig flows from the north-east corner of the plateau, crosses the main road at Lanjora, winds round by Malakot, cuts the Kondagaon-Narayanpur road at Alwa, passing mostly through scrubby jungle and open tracts of embanked rice-fields, with occasional hills strewn with rocky boulders. Finally it forces its way between steep banks and large rocks till it joins the Boroda near Bayanar. The Boroda comes down through the Amabera Pargana, into the Kongur Pargana, across very similar country, then flows on with the Baordig to join the Indrawati at Karikot.

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

133 These are the main features of the Kondagaon Tahsil: a main road,
491 open all the year round and vibrating day and night to the rumble of lorries
connecting the capital with the greater world. A high plateau, broken by
one range of hills running north from Bara Dongar and to the south and east.

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KONDAGAON TAHSIL

Two main rivers and many streams. Forest everywhere, mainly sal forest, green all the year. Four fair-weather roads; one east from Kesal along the northern border to Bishrampur and on into Jeypore and the Likma Forest

INTRODUCTION

Railway; another from Kondagaon itself round the Makri Reserved Forest, a hunter's paradise. A third goes west from Berma to Antagarh, skirting the south of the Tellinghat Hills. A fourth and most important connects the two tahsil headquarters of Kondagaon and Narayanpur. 133 ●
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There are no towns and few important villages. Kondagaon itself has a court with a First Class Magistrate, a police-station, dispensary, middle school, forest, excise and revenue offices and a headquarters of a timber company, a few shops, and an important bi-weekly bazaar. Thousands of Muria visit the place for the Marhai festival in March. There is only one other police-station, at Keskal, an important village at the head of the pass leading down to the lowlands. There are schools here and at Baniagaon, Mardapal, Pharasgaon and Bara Dongar. Bara Dongar is a beautiful village with important Hindu temples and a special connexion with the Maharaja, who is ceremonially enthroned here, when a smaller version of the royal Dassera festival is observed every year.

The population of the Kondagaon Tahsil in 1941 was 111,428. The area is 1880 square miles. It has 511 villages, of which 23 are deserted. In 1942 I counted 276 ghotul in the tahsil, but this figure is probably an underestimate.

The headquarters of the western tahsil have recently been moved from Antagarh to Narayanpur. The Narayanpur Tahsil is much larger than Kondagaon, being 2885 square miles, but its population is only 62,305. It has 831 villages, of which however only 565 are inhabited. In 1942 there were about 244 Muria ghotul. The tahsil has much more character and diversity than Kondagaon and it is not easy to describe. It will be most convenient to follow its roads.

From Berma on the main Keskal-Jagdarpur road, there branches a forest road through heavily-wooded and attractive country to Amabera and thence to Antagarh. In its course the road passes the village of Penjori at the edge of the high plateau: two miles away at the end of a path winding through magnificent trees and wild mountain scenery is the famous shrine of Lingo at Semurgaon. Thence the road begins an abrupt descent down the Matlaghat to the Antagarh plain. Unhappily a fringe of trees and tall bamboos, as nearly everywhere in Bastar, hides the view from the traveller's eyes. At the foot of the mountains the road is only 900 feet above sea-level and has reached the northern plain which is simply a continuation southward of the Chhattisgarh-Kanker lowlands. Here is Antagarh, the old administrative centre of the tahsil, where there is still a large bazaar, a police-station and a school. The population of this area is very mixed, for the Muria are influenced both by the wild Muria of the hills and the sophisticated Gond of the lowlands. There are many immigrants from British India.

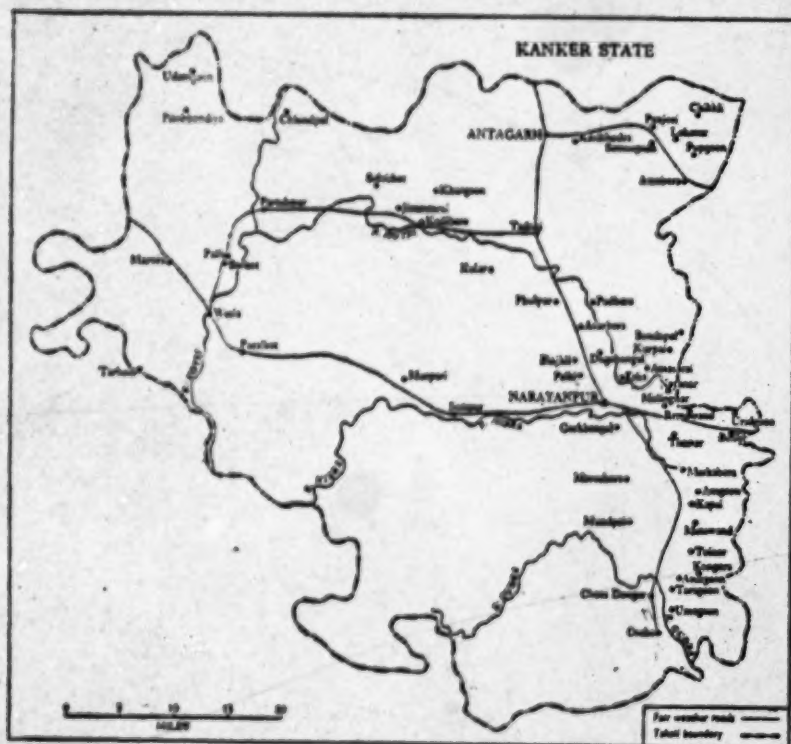
From Antagarh runs a beautiful road to Narayanpur. On the right are hills of vitrified sandstone that glow pink like dolomite rocks in the evening sun, and half-way along the road climbs the magnificent Raughat between the Abujhmar and Matlaghat Hills. In the woods on either side are charming Muria villages, Padbera, Aturbera, Phulpar and many others.

Narayanpur itself is a very large village not yet grown into a town. It is fresh and open, surrounded by hills in the near distance. Near by is Binjhli among its great mango groves and palms.

From Narayanpur roads go west, south and east. The western road is one of the loneliest and most exciting in Bastar. After passing the Halba centre of Sompur, it forces its way into the very heart of the Abujhmar through wild and majestic scenery, and on to Paralkot and Partabpur. Here is the

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

most striking landmark of all Bastar, the great mass of the Abujmar Mountains, an impregnable fortress, wild, lonely, exalted, exhilarating, home of the Hill Maria. To the west of the mountains, in sharp and striking contrast, is one of the most 'civilized' areas of Bastar, the north-western plain, where the ghotul still flourishes, but a little shyly, and the children have none of the decorations that make their fellows to the south such a delight to see.



NARAYANPUR TAHSIL

The road curves round at Partabpur and runs east back to Antagarh. For a great part of its journey it runs near and parallel to the beautiful Kotri river. The Kotri, which has its source in the Raughat and Matlaghat Hills, flows west through Kolibera to meet another river of the same name that comes down through Kanker from Drug. They meet near Partabpur and travel on together through the Muria tracts of the extreme west into Sironcha, until at last they join the Indrawati at Bhairamgarh. This is the river that makes glad the heart of the Muria of the north-west. It is a lovely river, wide and open, with glorious sands, and every now and then a glimpse of distant mountains. Some of the happiest days of my life have been spent on its banks.

INTRODUCTION

South and east of Narayanpur is the true Jhoria country, home of the most charming and friendly people in Bastar. Between Narayanpur and Chota Dongar, the villages of the Abujmar foothills, Kapsi, Markabera, Metawand, Kongera are probably Hill Maria in origin. Beyond Chota Dongar a road goes up into the real Maria country and Orcha village, passing through the wonderful Marian gorge, where the Gudra river emerges through enormous wooded rocks out of the hills.

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THE PARGANAS OF THE NARAYANPUR TAHSIL

The area east of the Antagarh-Narayanpur road is equally attractive. Here are the villages of Nayanar, Bandopal, Almer and Jhakri which frequently appear in this book. The country is well-wooded and hilly, more varied and beautiful than the Kondagaon Tahsil into which it leads. The old Hindu centre of Benur is near the road half-way between the two tahsils.

I have spoken throughout of roads, for they provide a convenient means of finding places on a map, and actually divide up the two northern tahsils very well. But it should not be supposed that these roads are great highways of traffic. Except for the Keskai-Jagdarpur road, not one of them is open during the rains. Several cannot be used by cars before December. The roads are important as agents of culture-change, however, because along them come the slow-moving trains of bullock-wagons, the ever-touring chaprasi and constable, the merchant on his laden horse. These are not, of course, confined to the official roads; the inter-village communications of north Bastar

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3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943

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● 133



Scenery in Dantewara Tahsil



[facing p. 48]

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3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943

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Distant view of the Bailadila Hills

[Facing p. 64]